The Importance of Defining Technical Issues in Interagency Environmental Negotiations
Berton Lee Lamb, Nina Burkardt, Jonathan Taylor
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In an analysis of the same comparative case study that was discussed above, Lamb et al. found that technical clarity was one of the most critical elements in resolving conflicts. In the least successful cases, parties failed to address the basic values of the dispute before plunging into technical studies. The results of those studies usually highlighted the potential for negative outcomes and increased polarization between the participants. In the most successful cases, the various parties shared an understanding of each of their basic values. These shared understandings led to technical studies that cast the negotiations in a positive light and illuminated possible solutions.

Methods
In order to measure technical clarity, interviewers asked a series of questions to determine how clearly technical issues were defined during the negotiation process. During the interviews, Lamb et al. traced the history of each case to chronicle and measure changes in technical clarity over the course of the negotiation. A case was determined to have technical issues clarity when:

1. All parties agreed to the definition of the technical issues throughout the process (but especially during the stage when final agreement was being forged).
2. Definition of the technical issues was rated from high to very high (between 7 and 10) by all respondents.

In this context, technical clarity refers to situations where the parties understand the *values* and *facts* involved in research and believe that outcomes suggested by study findings will provide potential gains. Technical values include many issues such as determining which resources will be influenced by the project. Answering the value questions determines what studies should be investigated and how large will be the range of effects they consider. Technical facts arise from investigations and include findings such as the effect that level and timing of low releases have on power production and fish habitat.

Discussion
In the two fully successful cases, value questions were resolved before decisions were made on technical studies and that resolution helped guide the development, implementation, and analysis of the studies. As a result, technical questions cast the negotiation in a positive light that emphasized opportunities for gain.

A shared understanding of the positive benefits related to answering technical questions, helped parties in the two fully successful cases move forward. Parties shared an understanding of technical facts and values and they believed the issues were amenable to analysis that would identify options rather than obstacles. One of the most difficult tasks in the consultations was for parties to arrive at some ethical premise that would guide their negotiations. In the successful negotiations, results illuminated options for resolution and the environmental effects seemed minor.

In the two cases that were less successful, the value issues were clear, but clarity was not achieved through bargaining. It was clear to everyone that choosing objects of study immediately constrained the available options for resolution. As a result, the parties could not agree on their professional judgment of what should be studied.

In the final two cases, Ashton-St. Anthony and Pit 3,4,5, both values and facts were unclear. All parties expressed confusion about how to conduct the consultation. Studies were undertaken without agreement on purpose or method. Steps were taken to conduct studies, acquire lands, or perform other mitigation activities without a clear connection to goals beyond meeting milestones in an uncertain process.

Conclusion

The most successful negotiations focused on two technical elements:

1. Coming to agreement on desirable conditions (values).
2. Selecting and conducting studies resulting in facts that contributed to a positive context of negotiation.

In the least successful negotiations, parties attempted to force acceptance of their versions of project operations without resolving—and in some cases, without even clarifying—their values. In those cases, technical studies were intended to set the stage for a limited suite of outcomes. Thus, technical options and results were presented in a way that cast the negotiations in a negative light and emphasized the significance of loss. In the least successful cases, negotiators often plunged into their task without clearly defining the problem, hoping that a series of studies would illuminate the best course of action. Rather than leading to a solution, this most often demonstrated how hard the bargaining would be and highlighted the risks of compromise.